1: Kroeber E-5 (1901) 1908
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INDUSTRIES AND IMPLEMENTS.

281 When a skin was brought in, it was hung on a sort of tripod, and with a chisel-like flesher of buffalo-leg bone the meat was removed. Then the hide was stretched on the ground to dry. When dried, the hair and thin coat of skin on the same side were cut off with the familiar implement of bent elk-horn, always provided, in recent times, with a metal blade. To make rawhide, nothing more was done. To make dressed skin, liver, grease, and brains, boiled and mixed in the proper proportion, were rubbed [177] or soaked into the skin and then removed with an ordinary scraper, now usually of sheet-iron or tin. Finally the skin was worked over with a rough stone or a bone. In preparing buffalo-skins for a tent, four steps were recognized: first, drying the skins; next, removing the hair; third, soaking them; and, last, scraping and working them over. Skins were softened by being drawn over a rope of buffalo-sinew.

281 342 476 When a woman had prepared enough buffalo-skins for a tent, she made a feast and invited other women who were skilful at making tents. The most expert of these fitted and tacked the skins together loosely, and the others sewed them fast. When a robe was to be embroidered, the woman who wanted to make it prepared food and invited other women to help her in her work. When the robe was finished, the man who was to receive it was called in, and it was given to him.

281 Caps of buffalo-skin were worn in winter. They were provided with flaps that were pulled down over the ears and held by a string fastened under the chin. Mittens of buffalo-skin were also used, tied together by a string which passed behind the neck. When the hunter was ready to shoot, he slipped his hands out of the mittens.

282 Simple flat unbraided ropes of rawhide were cut out of the skin in a long spiral. After having been cut, they were stretched between two sticks. In order to soften them, they were covered with manure, or tied to a horse that dragged them over the ground until they became pliable.

323 252 Pottery is declared to have been made formerly of clay mixed with crushed rock. Rawhide bags, drawn together at the top with a string, were also used for cooking by means of hot rocks. The often described Plains method of cooking in holes in the ground lined with rawhide was also followed.

372 When fire was struck with flint and steel, dry mushrooms were sometimes used as tinder.

411 Bows were most frequently made of cherry-wood, but sometimes of ash. Ash was harder and more elastic, but more brittle. Sinew backing was

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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well together during the ensuing summer months, a band or two moving off by themselves to rejoin the tribe in time to prepare for whatever Sacred Dances might have been scheduled, and parties of 10, 20, 30 or more men would go off to raid the enemy. Precautions had to be taken, too, against the ever-present danger of being raided by the enemy, especially by smaller groups separated from the main tribe as they went further and further from the center of their territory in quest of game.[1]

The hides of buffalo killed during the spring and summer were used to make parfleshes, moccasin soles, lodge covers, ropes and the like. Fresh meat was usually plentiful although it was necessary to move six or eight times a summer to keep up with the buffalo, some smaller herds of which apparently remained in Montana in spite of the migration of the vast majority to the north. Meantime as the various berries, wild fruits and wild roots ripened, collecting was done whenever opportunity offered, neither tribal nor band movements being determined, so far as we are aware, by that objective, but depending almost entirely on the whereabouts of the buffalo. During August and September, the rutting season, the buffalo joined in great milling masses leaving bare the surrounding range for many miles. The buffalo then separated into smaller herds again and by October, when the Gros Ventres started their concerted fall hunt, the buffalo were in prime condition, their coats sleek and fine.

The best time for robe hunting was approximately from October 15 to November 15, but the hunt continued until all had sufficient meat dried and stored to see them through the winter. It was said that as many robes as possible were dressed with the fur on, and

[1] In this connection it is interesting to note that the old Cree, quoted by Thompson, pp. 329–30, after describing a drawn battle between the Snake and Piegan about 1730 concludes: ". . . night put an end to the battle without a scalp being taken on either side, and in those days such was the result, unless one party was more numerous than the other. The great mischief of war then, was as now [1786], by attacking and destroying small camps of 10–30 tents which are obliged to separate for hunting." Such was evidently still the case in the middle of the 19th century. Denig writes in 1854, pp. 548–50, that when the contending parties are nearly equal, little damage is done. The worst damage occurs, however, when 200 to 400 warriors surprise a camp of 20 to 30 lodges.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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In April, when the sap rises, the Gros Ventres scraped the juice from the inner bark peeled from cottonwood and sometimes even from box-elder. They also chewed the gum from pines. Infusions of cherry bark or roots and peppermint were said to have been drunk as tea, but such concoctions were considered usually more in the nature of medicines.

So long as the Gros Ventres had the buffalo, relatively little in the way of foodstuffs from the white man were imported. Sugar, flour, occasional fresh fruits, coffee and tea were known and used to some extent after about 1855.[10] The possibility of obtaining whiskey, was, however, one of the items which determined the popularity of a given trading place. Incidentally, tobacco was an important item of trade after 1800, although prior to that time the Gros Ventres had raised their own.[11]

Clothing and Adornment

The importance of the buffalo in the economy of the Gros Ventres was as obvious in clothing and in shelter as it was in food. The buffalo robe, dressed with the hair on, was perhaps the most valuable article inasmuch as it was not only a regular part of their garb, but also was the main article of trade with the whites after about 1830. When decorated, it had high prestige value as a gift.

Seldom was the hide of a buffalo older than two years used for robes since the fur of those of greater age was usually scabby even in the fall when the coats were in best condition. It required the skin of a yearling to make a robe for a twelve-year-old, and the skins of calves made robes for smaller children. When the demand of the trade for robes was very great, the large wool blanket sometimes replaced the robe for wearing apparel and for bedding.

Most of the other articles of clothing were made from well-dressed deer, elk and antelope skins.[12] Deer and elk were more

[10] See p. 22.

[11] This tradition is confirmed by Cocking in 1772, who writes, p. 111, "The tobacco they use is their own planting which hath disagreable flavor. I have preserved a specimen." Kroeber's informants denied knowledge of the tradition.

[12] In 1854 Denig, pp. 464–65, describes the cloth bought for clothing for summer and fall wear, but states that a real hunter must have a buffalo robe, moccasins, mittens, cap, skin leggings and an extra buffalo robe.

successfully hunted than antelope. While the finest clothing was made from deer, elk was preferred for some purposes such as moccasins and warm shirts and coats—it being more durable but not equally as flexible.

For winter wear, caps and mittens of beaver or otter were made for men and boys. Beaver skin served as a breech clout for the men in winter, although antelope was preferred for this purpose the rest of the year, unless cloth were available, since the latter was more comfortable than hide which chafed the skin so badly.

Ordinarily unornamented clothing was worn, but for special events, particularly when the whole tribe was together, everyone dressed in his best. Being well-dressed was as important to the Gros Ventres as being well-mounted on ceremonial and social occasions. The effect on both the eye and the ear was taken into account in the ornamentation. Dyed porcupine-quill embroidery lent color, and mica—first heated, then powdered and rubbed over a robe—glistened beautifully. Polished deer-hoofs as edging for a robe or dangling from leggings or garters "made such a nice sound when one walked." This feeling both for color and sound was carried over when material from the whites was at hand, beadwork tending to supplant the quill embroidery and scraps of bright colored cloth and of metal serving as "dangles." [18]

Elk teeth, however, were said to be "the greatest decoration of the Gros Ventres." They were used principally for girls' and women's dresses. Not so long ago there was a man at Hays who wore a vest trimmed with elk teeth, and people would say to him: "You crazy thing, only women have that kind of decoration!" But he was unconventional and would retort: "Well, I dance, too, and I want to look nice." Everyone would laugh, but he persisted in wearing that vest. Human hair as fringe and on moccasins was proudly worn by men who had taken scalps.

Mink, otter, weasel, muskrat and kit-fox were all used as trimmings, and occasionally the whole pelt of mink, otter or muskrat was made into a bag, or tobacco pouch, or other small container. Feathers, especially eagle feathers, were highly prized, and red

[18] For the detailed comparative analysis of Decorative Art of the Gros Ventres and other plains tribes, see Kroeber, 1908, pp. 151–79.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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224 476 [431] would share at least the meat, if not the hides, with the less fortunate, which latter would contribute by helping skin and butcher. Butchering was quite an art and was considered the man's work, although occasionally women accompanied the hunting party if there were a shortage of men, as was liable to be the case especially in winter. Should the party have crossed a river to hunt, the meat was prepared for transportation on a raft by being cut into large chunks, and each two chunks skewered and joined by a thong of sufficient length to hang on the poles forming the raft. The raft [316] was built by crossing two long poles at one end, the other ends free and forming an angle of about thirty degrees. Three or four shorter poles were placed crosswise and lashed firmly in place with rawhide. The paunch of the buffalo, after being washed out, was used as a container for the many leftover bits of meat and was tied to the middle of the lower rung of the raft. A whole beef could thus be loaded on such a raft and towed across by one horseman. When, as was more usually the case, the meat was to be [492] packed back to camp by horses, the butchering was done differently but in such a way that a whole buffalo could be packed on a single [251] horse.[8] Sometimes in winter when a small party went out and they could not pack all the meat back in one trip, the remainder was buried in the snow and called for the following day.

462 281 Once the proceeds of the hunt were turned over to the households of the individual hunters, it was the woman's task to cook the food for immediate consumption and to prepare the surplus for storage. Her most arduous and time-consuming task was the dressing of skins and the manufacture of these into finished articles of clothing, containers, lodge-covers, and so on. It was stated that skins in one stage of preparation or another were nearly always at hand.[9] "They didn't do things in a haphazard way because there was a certain time to do this and a certain time to do that." From the hides of buffalo killed during the spring and early summer, when the hair was not thick, they made the parfleshes and bags, soles for moccasins, rawhide ropes, and lodge-covers. In the fall, when the hide was furry, robes were made.

The older women informants described how, when they were

[8] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 149.

[9] For some details on skin dressing, see Kroeber, 1908, p. 150.

The older women informants described, when they were young, they would work at scraping skins pegged to the ground, by leaning over from the waist, feet well apart and knees unbent, swinging sideways from the hips. They could keep up this rhythmical steady motion, with the short-handled scraper usually tipped with metal, for hours at a time, one day after another. Sometimes, too, a woman would spend a whole day softening ropes of rawhide by rubbing the rope which had been run through the eye and ear apertures of a buffalo skull upon which the horns had been left so that she, sitting on the ground with legs extended, could rest her feet against the horns as she pulled the rope back and forth, making it soft and white.[4] Nevertheless the tedium of these operations was often relieved by the fact that occasionally other women, who had at the moment some leisure, would hear the work going on and would volunteer to help.

It was customary for women to do much of their work in groups. If a young woman, for instance, wished to make a fine robe, she would call in some other women, including an older experienced "hand." The latter would mark the robe where the embroidery should go, and the younger women did the fancy work. The hostess would cook for all present and so, in a pleasant atmosphere of sociability and "woman talk," the work would progress. A similar type of gathering would be held when a sufficient number of hides had been saved to make a lodge cover.

In size the lodges ranged from six skins up to twenty-four or twenty-five, with the average of about fourteen to seventeen.[5] Much skill was needed for cutting and fitting the skins and an experienced woman would be called in to do that part, while the others helped with the task of sewing the skins together. Our informants stated that a woman would have to "save and save" skins towards a new lodge, which was a necessity about every three years.

Women went out in groups to pick berries and wild fruits as well as to dig roots, but each one had right of disposal over what

[4] Another method for softening ropes is given by Kroeber, 1908, p. 150.

[5] The largest lodge remembered by the Gros Ventres is said to have been that of the Blood Chief, Father of All, who had, at the time of the 1855 treaty, a lodge with two fires, poles 65 ft. long, and the cover consisting of more than 25 skins.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
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ance with given practice it must have been carried away on a hill or elsewhere.[1] 782

[1] In 1948 The Boy gave a detailed description of the rite should the killer of an albino or "beaver" buffalo present the skin to the Pipe, rather than offer it as a sacrifice. He said that in this case, the man presented the green hide to the Pipe with a ritual directed by the keeper and included the painting of the donor. The keeper then called in two young women known to be expert tanners, received them ritually, and instructed them in procedures to be followed in tanning this particular hide. He made a crown, bracelets and anklets of twisted sage for each woman while singing a special song (not recorded by Cooper). When the hide was dressed there was a big feast at the keeper's lodge at which the keeper ritually painted the skin red. The keeper gave the donor of the skin the choice of any horse from all except one of his herd; to each of the women tanners he gave three valuable presents. [R.F.] [281 301] [431]